

How to write a summary

A summary is a shortened version of a longer text in your own words without personal opinions or an interpretation. It contains the most important information of the original text a reader or listener should know to get an idea of what it is about.

Before writing

- Read the text carefully and underline important key words and key phrases. You can also note down headings for the different paragraphs in the margin.
- Take notes of the important facts and ideas. Making a **key word outline** can be useful. Sometimes key words - expressions or topics a paragraph may deal with - are used in the text. Sometimes you may have to find one to sum up the contents of the paragraph.
- Leave out information that is not essential, such as examples, detailed descriptions, statistics, etc.

While writing

- Start with a sentence naming the writer and the text's / story's title (and year of publication, if necessary) and stating its main idea.
- Write the summary using your notes as guidance. Think about how you could express the main ideas from the text differently (using synonyms, paraphrasing, etc.).
- Use your own words and do not copy sentences from the text.
- Concentrate on the basic ideas, facts and arguments.
- Do not add your own opinion or interpretation.
- Do not quote from the text but use your own language.
- If necessary, change direct speech into reported speech.
- Use the present simple.
- Your summary should be between one third and one fifth of the original text.

After writing

- Re-read your summary and check if you have followed the rules above.
- Have you covered all the essential points?
- Is your summary clear enough for somebody who does not know the original text?
- Have you used connectives to link your sentences?
- Have you checked your text for mistakes and correctness?

Checklist for a good analysis

In the examples used in this text different types of keywords are either in **bold**, *italic*, or underlined

- read the task carefully and underline the content keywords (EXAMPLE: "Analyse Obama's inauguration speech by paying special attention to references to the American Dream and *stylistic devices* he uses to make his *speech convincing*.")
- make sure that you take up these keywords in your introduction and conclusion (EXAMPLE: In his inauguration speech Obama predominantly refers to the concepts of Multiculturalism and Melting Pot in order to bring across **his idea of change** that predominated his presidential campaign. This **idea of change** is further brought across by *stylistic devices such as metaphors and references to American history*. => Note how this introduction not only takes up the two keywords from the task [see the colour code] but also introduces a thematic read thread (i.e. the "idea of change") for the analysis. A reader will now expect that the analysis will discuss *how* the idea of change is brought across, i.e. which references to the American Dream and which stylistic devices are employed to illustrate Obama's idea of change).
- a good conclusion is a summary of your arguments, i.e. it takes up the content keywords of the task again without repeating the introduction and without starting a new line of argument (EXAMPLE: Finally one can say that it is especially Obama's *references to the American Revolution* and his metaphors from the *word fields of prosperity and hope* that make his speech so captivating for the audience. His outline of a future America that no longer is regarded as a Melting Pot but as a Salad Bowl which accepts and invites cultural and ethnic diversity gives hope to all those citizens who felt neglected by the Bush administration. => see how the conclusion is more concrete than the introduction because you can refer to examples that you discussed in your analysis.)
- do not lose sight of your 'read thread'. You can only create a coherent text if you know how your argument develops. Ideally you made such conclusive notes beforehand so that when you start writing your text you immediately know what comes where (and believe me, although the note-taking will take much longer, writing the actual text will take up amazingly little time if you know exactly what you want to say and in what order you want to say it). Bear in mind that you get 30 (!!!) points for a well-structured, economic text with a good introduction and conclusion.
- pay attention to paragraph structure. As a rule of thumb: one sentence is not a paragraph. A paragraph is a sense unit, i.e. it consists of a number of sentences that circle around one aspect of your line of argument (i.e. one paragraph covering the concept of "multiculturalism" or one paragraph discussing Obama's use of metaphors).

How to write a comment

The aim of a comment is to demonstrate that you are able to present your opinion on a certain topic or issue in a coherent form. Writing a comment is often a requirement in both school-leaving and international language proficiency examinations. You usually have a time limit and must keep within a certain number of words.

How to proceed:

Step 1: Read the task(s) carefully and make sure you know what you have to do.

Step 2: Collect and group your ideas - either in a mind map or as an outline. This way you will have an overview of what you are going to say, and can plan your introduction.

Step 3: Make your introductory statement, in which you refer to the task and voice a first opinion.

Step 4: Devote one paragraph to each of the arguments you want to present. If you are weighing up the pros and cons of an issue, you can take the argumentative approach and deal with all the arguments in favour first, and then against. Alternatively, you can discuss one aspect at a time, presenting the ideas for and against.

Step 5: Make your concluding statement, in which you sum up your arguments. Useful phrases are:

- *All in all, I think it can be said that...*
- *In conclusion, I would like to say that...*
- *I would like to conclude by saying that...*

Points to remember:

- Present your arguments clearly and precisely, avoiding repetition.
- Illustrate your ideas with appropriate examples.
- Underline the structure of your text with connectors.
- Keep track of the number of words you write as you go along.

Plan your time carefully, and make sure you have time left at the end to proofread your text and, if the use of a dictionary is permitted, to check spelling and proper use of words.